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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 001171

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D COPY (SIGNATURE LINE CHANGE)

DEPT FOR EUR/WE (D.MENUTTI)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/04/2012

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SUBJECT: THE VATICAN'S ""OTHER"" INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR JIM NICHOLSON FOR REASONS 1.5 (A) AND (D).

1.(C) SUMMARY: THIS IS AN OVERVIEW OF THE VATICAN'S INTEREST IN THE MIDDLE EAST, OUTSIDE OF THE ISRAEL/PALESTINIAN DISPUTE AND THE STATUS OF JERUSALEM. DCM RECENTLY MET WITH NEW VATICAN MIDDLE EAST DIRECTOR, TOMASSO COPPOLA, MONSIGNOR  
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JOHAN BONNY, A CHIEF NEGOTIATOR IN THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY, AND MEMBERS OF THE ARAB DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY ACCREDITED TO THE VATICAN. THE VATICAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IS GENERALLY FOUNDED ON ""DEFENDING THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON"", AND IS THUS LARGELY CONGRUENT WITH USG INTERESTS. IN THE MIDDLE EAST, HOWEVER, IT HAS A NUMBER OF PARTICULAR INTERESTS, SOME WHERE WE CAN EXPECT TO AGREE, OTHERS WHERE OUR INTERESTS ARE STARKLY OPPOSITE. THE VATICAN'S INTERESTS IN THIS REGION ARISE FROM AN INDIGENOUS CONSTITUENCY (E.G. CHALDEANS IN IRAQ) AS WELL AS DIALOG WITH THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST AND THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES OF THE REGION (EG. THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH). COUNTRIES OF INTEREST ARE MOST NOTABLY LEBANON, IRAQ, SYRIA AND TO A LESSER DEGREE JORDAN AND EGYPT. THE LACK OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR THE FOREIGN CATHOLICS (MOSTLY FILIPINO GUEST WORKERS) IN SAUDI ARABIA WILL REMAIN AN ISSUE OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE FOR THE VATICAN. FROM A STRICTLY GEOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVE THE VATICAN WILL ALSO STRIVE TO HAVE GOOD RELATIONS WITH IRAN.  
END SUMMARY

## 2.(C) CONCERN FOR CATHOLIC MINORITIES

AS WITH ANY NATION-STATE, THE VATICAN STRIVES TO PROTECT ITS ""CITIZENS"" OVERSEAS. FOR THE VATICAN, THIS CITIZEN-CONSTITUENCY IS COMPOSED OF CATHOLICS. IN THE MIDDLE EAST THE COUNTRY OF PRIME CONCERN IN THIS REGARD IS LEBANON. ACCORDING TO VATICAN ISSUED FIGURES, THERE ARE 1.9 MILLION CATHOLICS IN LEBANON, 311,000 CATHOLICS IN SYRIA, AND 277,000 CATHOLICS IN IRAQ. THE VATICAN DOES NOT CONSIDER LEBANON A MUSLIM COUNTRY WITH A CATHOLIC MINORITY, BUT A COUNTRY IN WHICH CATHOLICS ARE EQUAL PARTNERS. IT SEES LEBANON AS A  
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COUNTRY WHICH SHOULD SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE FOR CHRISTIAN/ISLAMIC COEXISTENCE. FOREIGN MINISTER TAURAN, AS WELL AS MIDDLE EAST DIRECTOR COPPOLA HAVE BOTH SERVED IN LEBANON, AND ARE PERSONALLY INTERESTED IN THE LEBANESE SITUATION. ALTHOUGH, ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL VATICAN FIGURES, THERE ARE MORE CATHOLICS IN SYRIA THAN IRAQ, THE VATICAN IS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SAFETY OF THE CHALDEAN CATHOLICS IN IRAQ THAN WITH THAT OF THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES IN SYRIA. THIS IS BECAUSE THE VATICAN SEES THE LIKELIHOOD OF AN ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST REGIME COMING TO POWER AS HIGHER IN IRAQ THAN IN SYRIA. THERE IS ALSO A SMALL CATHOLIC MINORITY IN JORDAN (72,000 ACCORDING TO VATICAN FIGURES) COMPOSED OF ETHNIC PALESTINIANS.

## 3.(C) DIALOG WITH THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST AND THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES

THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST WAS THE FIRST MAJOR CHRISTIAN BODY TO FALL OUT ON COMMUNION WITH ROME. THIS OCCURRED IN THE 5TH CENTURY OVER THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES. ITS SEAT WAS MOVED FROM PERSIA TO BAGHDAD IN 766 WHERE IT HAS REMAINED. IN 1553 A GROUP FROM WITHIN THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH REENTERED COMMUNION WITH ROME, WHICH WAS THE START OF THE CHALDEAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. THE VATICAN IS CLOSER TO ""REUNIFICATION"" WITH THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST THAN WITH ANY OTHER BODY OF EASTERN CHURCHES. IN 1994, POPE JOHN PAUL II AND THE ASSYRIAN PATRIARCH SIGNED A DECLARATION WHICH BASICALLY ENDED ALL THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES. DIALOG CONTINUES FOR FULL REUNIFICATION. THUS, IN ADDITION TO PROTECTING THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF IRAQ, THE VATICAN NEEDS GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE  
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IRAQI GOVERNMENT FOR AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE ""OFFICIAL"" IRAQI CHRISTIAN CHURCH CAN CONTINUE.

THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX COMMUNITY IS COMPOSED OF SIX INDEPENDENT NATIONAL CHURCHES WHICH ARE IN COMMUNION WITH EACH OTHER, BUT NOT WITH THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST, THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, OR THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES (E.G. GREEK, RUSSIAN, ETC). THIS BODY BROKE WITH THE MAIN BODY OF THE CHURCH (AT THAT TIME LOCATED IN ROME AND CONSTANTINOPLE) IN THE FIFTH CENTURY, APPROXIMATELY 30 YEARS AFTER THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH'S BREAK. THIS ORIENTAL ORTHODOX COMMUNITY IS COMPOSED OF THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH, THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH (EGYPT), THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, THE MALANKARA ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH (INDIA), AND THE ERITREAN ORTHODOX CHURCH. THE VATICAN'S DIALOG WITH THIS COMMUNITY IS NOT AS FAR ALONG AS WITH THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH,

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	COR-01	NP-00	AMAD-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00
	DS-00	FBIE-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	VCE-00
	NEA-00	NSAE-00	SSO-00	SS-00	T-00	EPAE-00	SNIS-00
	NISC-00	DSCC-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/001W		
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FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
AMEMBASSY RIYADH  
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4.(C) WHAT ARE THE VATICAN'S INTERESTS AND WHAT SHOULD THE U.S. EXPECT

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IRAQ: IRAQ WILL REMAIN A BONE OF CONTENTION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND VATICAN. WE SHOULD EXPECT THE VATICAN TO STRONGLY CONDEMN THE CONTINUED EMBARGO AS "HARMFUL" TO THE IRAQI POPULATION. IN ITS EYES, THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE TO SADDAM HUSSEIN EXCEPT AN ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST REGIME. THUS FOR REASONS OF PROTECTING THE CATHOLICS IN IRAQ, AS WELL AS CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST, THE VATICAN WILL BE AMONG THE LEAST VOCAL INTERNATIONAL CRITICS OF THE CURRENT REGIME. WE SHOULD EXPECT VOCAL, PUBLIC CRITICISM OF ANY MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ.

SYRIA: BECAUSE DAMASCUS IS THE SEAT OF THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, AND ON ACCOUNT OF THE PRESENCE OF A LARGE CATHOLIC

COMMUNITY, THE VATICAN IS CONTINUE TO SEEK CORRECT, GOOD  
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IRAN: THE NUMBER OF CATHOLICS IS MINUSCULE (12,000 BY  
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SAUDI ARABIA: THERE ARE OVER 1 MILLION FOREIGN CATHOLICS IN  
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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AMAD-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	DS-00
	FBIE-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	VCE-00	NEA-00
	NSAE-00	SSO-00	SS-00	EPAE-00	SNIS-00	NISC-00	DSCC-00
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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AMAD-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	DS-00
	FBIE-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	VCE-00	NEA-00
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POPE

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